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RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000269

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TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO MK GR

SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA: GREEK NAME NEGOTIATOR TELLS DIP CORPS "ONE NAME FOR ALL" WITH "GEOGRAPHIC MODIFIER"

Classified By: A/Political Counselor Jeff Hovenier for 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY/COMMENT

¶1. (SBU) Greek name negotiator Adamantios Vassilakis briefed the diplomatic corps on 2/26 on the state of play on the name issue. His key messages were:

-- Greece believes Macedonia maintains extensive irredentist designs on Greek territory (and he provided handouts and books);

-- Greece is committed to obtaining a solution to the name issues now and is working towards that end;

-- The solution should be "one name for all purposes;"

-- Greece wants the new name to have a "geographic modifier," and Greece will not accept a "descriptive modifier" such as "democratic, or constitutional Republic of Macedonia;"

-- Although Greece has been a leader in promoting the integration of the Balkans in NATO and the EU, "if necessary we will make an exception;" and

-- Greek and Macedonian negotiators will resume talks with Nimetz in New York "by the end of this week."

¶2. (C) Comment: Not surprisingly, Vassilakis took a tough line with the Diplomatic Corps in laying out Greece's maximalist positions. We will continue to press the GOG to show maximum flexibility in discussions with the Macedonians and with Nimetz. End Comment.

Macedonian Irredentism -- Alive and Well (?)

¶3. (SBU) Vassilakis led off his 2/26 briefing to the Athens-based diplomatic corps by expressing Greece's ongoing concerns about Macedonian irredentism. He provided a paper "documenting" this irredentism (faxed to EUR/SE and Embassy Skopje), a book by a Thessaloniki-based foundation entitled "FYROM'S Expansionist Designs against Greece after the Interim Accord (1995)," and a picture from the internet purportedly showing Macedonian PM Gruevski laying a wreath at the tomb of 19th century revolutionary figure Delchev, in which a map of a "greater Macedonia" is visible on the monument. Vassilakis said that Greece is taking this issue so seriously because of "what they are teaching and supporting," adding that Greece does not "fear Macedonia" but "will not accept irredentism."

¶4. (C) Comment: Our initial review of the material provided suggests that the Greeks have little to point to in support of their claims of ongoing irredentist claims. The Greek paper notes actions to rename Skopje's airport after Alexander the Great and ongoing efforts in certain Macedonian cities to erect statues of ancient Macedonian kings. However, the paper cites only three books to support claims

of irredentism -- a 2004 text that has since been withdrawn from the Macedonian Military Academy that had maps of a "greater Macedonia," a 2005 article in a magazine produced by the Macedonian Orthodox Church with a map of "Macedonia undivided," and a 1998 book that is no longer in circulation.

For months, the Greeks have been telling us they are "close to having finished" a paper that documents ongoing Macedonian irredentism; we suspect that they released it now to the diplomatic corps simply because they have no other examples to share with us. We would welcome Embassy Skopje insights about the purported photograph of PM Gruevski at the Delchev tomb with a "greater Macedonia" map in evidence (faxed to Embassy Skopje and EUR/SE). End Comment.

¶5. (SBU) Vassilakis stressed that Greece believes the time to resolve this issue is "now," and it has the highest attention from PM Karamanlis and FM Bakoyannis.

"One Name" to Rule Them All

¶6. (SBU) Vassilakis was clear - "We want there to be one constitutional name used for all purposes." He argued that should there be any other solution, arguments over the name would continue. When the German Ambassador noted that Greek press have suggested Greece may accept a "dual name" solution, Vassilakis responded, "I have given you the government position - one name used for all purposes. We don't want a solution where there is one name for the EU, another for the UN, and yet another for the Olympic Games, etc." However, Vassilakis added that "negotiations will be on both the name itself and the scope, and I can't predict how they will turn out."

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Geographic Modifier

¶7. (SBU) Vassilakis said that Greece insists that the new name contain a "geographic modifier." On the current list of names provided by Nimetz, "only one" would meet the Greek criteria. However, there are other possible names that could also work for Greece that Nimetz did not propose. What Greece "will not accept" is a name that "simply describes the existing regime," such as "democratic, independent, constitutional, and so on."

Veto Threat Real

¶8. (SBU) Vassilakis noted that Greece places a high priority on, and has actively lobbied for, NATO and EU integration of the Balkans. However, Greece has "competing interests" on this issue, and there should be no mistake that the GOG will veto Macedonia's NATO membership absent an agreement on the name. PM Karamanlis has been "very clear," on this point. Vassilakis added, "if necessary, this will be the exception" to Greek policy promoting NATO and EU integration.

Next Steps: Talks in NY This Week

¶9. (SBU) Vassilakis said the next round of talks will take place in New York "by the end of the week." At the end of the February 19 talks in Athens, Nimetz invited the negotiators to New York as soon as they were ready. Greece let Nimetz know last week that it has reviewed his proposal and is ready to discuss it. Skopje has now also informed Nimetz it is prepared to meet on this basis. Vassilakis said that the next meeting would either be Friday, 2/29, or Saturday 3/1 in New York. He added, however, that these

talks may be limited to each side meeting separately with Nimetz.

COMMENT

¶110. (C) It is not surprising that Vassilakis laid out Greece's maximalist position to the assembled diplomatic corps. Although the Macedonian Ambassador was not present, we expect that Skopje has already been informed of the content of Vassilakis' briefing. In our private conversations with Vassilakis and other GOG interlocutors, we continue to stress the importance of showing maximum flexibility and working on the basis of the Nimetz framework proposal. End Comment.

SPECKHARD